

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

Now that festival season is firmly upon us it can be hard to find music prepared to take chances, experiment, or which has a sense of emotional depth. Short DJ sets, unimaginative selectors, and impatient crowds mean that subtlety and nuance can be overlooked in the search for the next chant-a-long, or hands in the air anthem. This week I will be highlighting some music you are unlikely to hear at *Space* or *Glastonbury*, but which will challenge you and light up your day. By **JOHN BITTLES**

We have the deconstructed house of **SW**, the misty-eyed romanticism of **The Focus Group**, the brittle electronica of **Laurel Halo**, the ambient thud of **Pact Infernal**, and lots more.

So, get your brain and heart ready, and let us begin...



Vinyl-only label *SUED* have, over the last few years, been responsible for some of the finest dance music to grace these ears. EPs by the mysterious **SW**, **SVN**, **PG Sounds**, **Dresvn**, and **DJ Fett Burger** are unique, yet wonderful takes on traditional house sounds. Last November saw the imprint bring out their very first album, the fabulously warm Balearic house shuffle of *Untitled* by label head **SW**. It sold out within hours of its release. As the record is selling for upwards of £36 on *Discogs* the good people at *Apollo* have done the decent thing and given it a much needed re-release. Available from early July on vinyl or digital download, the LP is a delightfully tactile journey into the heart of groove. Tranquil and melodic when it needs to be, this is dance music content to exist with only the merest hint of a beat. Eschewing track titles, songs glow with a warm-heartedness which recalls the gentle deep house of **Larry Heard** one minute, the fidgety melodies of **DJ Sotofett** the next. With the ability to burrow its way straight to your soul, if there is a better electronic album released over the next few years than *Untitled* I will be most surprised. **10/10**.



It has been a fabulous few years for British label *Ghost Box*. Releases by **Pye Corner Audio**, **Belbury Poly** and **The Pattern Forms** have seen the imprint reach a creative peak few could predict. After **ToiToiToi's** excellent *Im Hag* LP from May, they maintain their good form with the weird but welcoming strains of *Stop-Motion Happening* by **The Focus Groop**. The alias of *Ghost Box* co-founder **Julian House**, **The Focus Groop** make synth-heavy instrumentals, whose wistful air envelops the listener like a series of long, lazy hugs. Dreamy sounding yet unsettling at times, most of the tracks last less than two minutes, helping the record resemble a series of vivid, overlapping dreams. Vignettes such as *Arpington Main*, *Hazy Time*, *Stage Craft And Screens* and *The Gone Outside* have a bright, woozy air full of inspiration and charm. The seven minute long opus *Medium In The Mirror* almost acts as the album's centrepiece, its string refrains and out of tune synths creating a wonderfully compelling fog of sound. Tired of the daily grind? Then allow yourself some time in *Stop-Motion Happening's* strange, pastoral world. **8.5/10**.



Most people who can remember the year 1988 will tend to reminisce about the emergence of acid house, or the developing strains of hip hop. Yet, just before **The Stone Roses**, **Primal Scream** and the **Happy Mondays** brought a new swagger to the scene, guitar-led indie music was in rude health. This month the good people at *Cherry Red Records* follow their *C86* reissue and its follow-up *C87*, with the imaginatively named, yet no less essential *C88*. Composed of three CDs jam-packed with introspective pop and catchy melodies, there can be no denying that the music found here is an awful lot of fun. With well known acts like **The Stone Roses**, **Another Sunny Day**, **The Mock Turtles**, **Pale Saints**, **The House Of Love**, **The Shamen**, and **Inspiral Carpets** contributing the album resembles an indie fan's wet dream. Yet, while it is the big names which may first arouse your interest, it is the songs by lesser known acts such as **The Pogguns**, **Moss Poles**, **The Train Set**, **Pacific**, and **The Sea Urchins** which make *C88* such an unbridled delight. **8.5/10**.



Hyperdub artist **Laurel Halo** makes a welcome return to the label this month with the dense electronic throb of *Dust*, her third LP. Rich with her own vocals, which have been cut up, treated and brutalised, the record's eleven tracks are both playful and cryptic, causing you to scratch your head one minute and break out into a huge grin the next. Two years in the making, the album is hugely experimental, yet never wilfully alienates the listener, helping make it **Laurel Halo's** most fully realised work yet. Take the song *Do U Ever Happen* for example: its bowel shaking bass and dense programming skilfully shield Laurel's vocals which break through the electronic fog every so often to enchant with their mournful air. Other gems include the low slung funk of opener *Sun To Solar*, the reconfigured pop jam that is *Moontalk*, the fucked up jazz of *Who Won?* and the beautifully woozy *Syzygy*. Not for beginners, *Dust* highlights an artist prepared to take chances in search of strange new sounds. And, although it may take a few listens before you feel properly at home, it doesn't take long before *Dust* settles into your life. **8/10**.



Rebolledo's *Mondo Alterado* LP from last year saw the Mexican producer embrace his inner synth nerd with some soundtrack inspired brilliance. This July the producer who is also known as one half of the **Pachanga Boys** revisit said album with a double pack of remixes which gently entice the originals towards the dancefloor. Spread across two CDs or three slabs of vinyl, *Mondo Re-Alterado* lets house upstarts **Red Axes**, **Maceo Plex**, **Superpitcher**, **Mike Simonetti** and others bring their own style to the songs. Tel-Aviv duo **Red Axes** get things off to a flying start with the dark industrial throb of their version of *Life Is Strange*. Other picks include **Maceo Plex's** synth-heavy rerub of *Discótico Pléxico*, **Superpitcher's** long, lingering take on *Rainboy Superspacer*, and the trippy electronica of **Mike Simonetti's** *Discótico Simonéttico Hypnótico* which ends things on a spine-tingling high. Trippy and engrossing, *Mondo Re-Alterado* revels in the power of the groove and sounds exactly how a great remix album should. **8.5/10**,

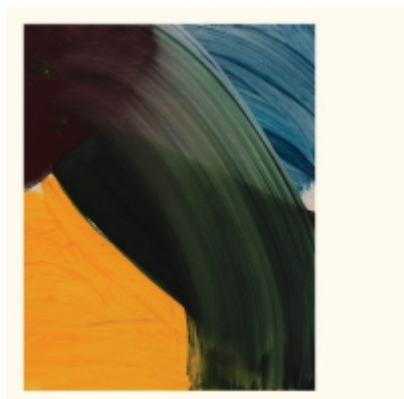


This week we'll end with some angst-ridden ambiance, happy to reside on the dark side, in the form of *Infernality* by **Pact Infernal**. After making a bit of a name for themselves in the techno scene with the dense sonic collages of *Descent Chapter I* and *II*, **Pact Infernal** return to the *Horo* label with the alien soundscapes of their debut album. Recalling the paranoia inducing scores of recent horror classics *It Follows*, or **Mica Levi's** *Under The Skin*, the record investigates a shadowy world where menace lingers just out of sight. Yet, don't let this put you off, as *Infernality* is a sinister sounding, yet compelling body of work. After the twisted nightmare of opener *Purification*, *Initiation* raises heartbeats and expectations as it pulses within the deepest bowels of bass. From here, *Philosophy* adds Eastern menace and rhythmic percussion to the mix, *Death & Rebirth* is the sound of something horrible creeping towards you from behind, *Symbology* focuses on ritualistic drums, while *Summoning* revels within its industrial grind. Proof, if ever it was needed, that the devil really does have the best tunes. **8/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Monika Werkstatt* by **V/A** - Hazy electronics and fuggy pop feature in a sublime album which came to life when Berlin legend **Gudrun Gut** decided to form a dream team of like minded spirits to explore the outer reaches of sound, **9/10**, *Platinum Tips + Ice Cream* by **Royal Trux** - The duo of **Jennifer Herrema** and **Neil Hagerty** make a welcome return to our stereos with a raw and jagged live album which, played loud, sounds effortlessly cool, **8/10**, *Providing Home* by **Mike Dehnert** - The *Fachwerk* label celebrate their 10th anniversary in fine style with the release of this soul infused, vocal rich techno record by a veteran producer at the very top of his game, **8/10**, *Subtle Vertigo* by **Scott Gilmore** - **Mark Barrott's** *International Feel* imprint comes up trumps yet again with the smooth Balearic air of the Californian producer's debut album, **8/10**, *Theory Of Colours* by **Dauwd** - *Ninja Tune* offshoot *Technicolour* keep the house vibes going with this short, but sweet seven track LP, **7/10**, *I Used To Spend So Much Time Alone* by **Chastity Belt** - Optimistic guitar pop which is all but guaranteed to make you smile, **7/10**, and *Cocoon Compilation Q* by **V/A** - **Sven Väth's** label return for the next instalment of their annual comp with twelve techno centric tracks from **Fort Romeau**, **John Tejada**, **Baba Stiltz**, and more,

8/10.



And let's not forget: *On The Echoing Green* by **Jefre Cantu-Ledesma** - Fans of **Slowdive** and 90s shoegaze should make a beeline for this rich psychedelic swirl of an album. Full of romantic longing and widescreen guitars, *On The Echoing Green* is a work of otherworldly beauty which will linger long in your heart, **9/10**, *Tape One/Tape Two* by **Young Fathers** - Before releasing the *Mercury Prize* winning *Dead*, the Scottish group were responsible for this pair of groundbreaking mixtapes, **8.5/10**, *Jeff Özdemir & Friends* by **V/A** - Out now on the always on point *Karaoke Kalk*, this double vinyl pack of woozy pop tunes make the perfect accompaniment to watching the day idly drift by, **8/10**, *Stranger* by **Joanne Pollock** - An enthralling mixture of distorted electronics, playful bass pulses, and Joanne's rich vocals out now on **Venetian Snares'** *Timesiq* imprint, **7.5/10**, *La Torre Vol 2* compiled by **Mark Barrott & Pete Gooding** - Sun-kissed Balearica, blissful ambiance and more feature in the Ibiza hotel's skilfully compiled comp, **7/10**, *Sunny Hills* by **All We Are** - The Liverpool three-piece return with a full-bodied stadium-ready sound full of emotional swells and no little skill, **7/10**, and *We Play House Recordings 10 Years* by **V/A** - To celebrate a decade of *We Play House* **DJ Red D** compiles a triple CD full of dance music with a gentle dollop of funk. With artists such as **Tyree Cooper**, **Locked Groove**, **Russ Gabriel** and **Art Of Tones** involved you'd best get your feet primed for dancing, **8/10**.